UN Warns Israel Over its Refusal to Cooperate with Human Rights Investigations

June 14, 2016

By Tovah Lazaroff

The Jerusalem Post

<http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/UN-warns-Israel-over-its-refusal-to-cooperate-with-human-rights-investigations-456678>

The United Nations implied Monday that Israel could be in trouble over its continued refusal to allow human rights investigators to alleged violations of international law against Palestinians access to the West Bank and Gaza.

“I very much regret the refusal by some countries to permit my staff to have access in order to monitor and report on events,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said. He spoke in Geneva at the opening session of the 32nd session of the UN Human Rights Council.

As part of a sweeping address on global human rights issues, he spoke about the role of his office and the council in preventing human rights abuses, but noted that some governments were not cooperating with his office.

He did not mention Israel by name. But the Jewish State has persistently denied UN special rapporteurs access to the West Bank and Gaza as part of their work in investigating Israeli against Palestinians.

The refusal stems from Israel deep conviction that the investigations are biased and akin to a “kangaroo” court whose negative judgment against Israel is already proscribed.

It has noted that the UNHRC mandates, under which the investigators are dispatched, look solely at Israeli violations and do not examine Palestinian ones.

On Monday Zeid said, however, that the investigators from his office had an important role to play in providing factual information that could prevent further violence.

“I must emphasize that non-cooperation by governments will not result in my office remaining silent,” he Zeid.

“On the contrary, it creates a presumption of major violations, and may deprive local and national actors of the opportunity to explain and provide information about events,” Zeid said.

“In updating this Council at the September session, I may list a number of countries where engagement with or access for my office is impeded,” he added.

Israel had no immediate response to Zeid’s comments. But its representative is scheduled to address the UNHRC on Tuesday.

Typically, issues relating to Israel at the UNHRC come up only during Agenda Item 7. The UNHRC is mandated to discuss possible Israeli human rights violations under this agenda item at every session.

But recently the Israeli-Palestinian has also been the subject of opening addresses, including by Zeid on Monday.

He warned of a possible escalation of violence between Israelis and Palestinians, both in the West Bank and Gaza, as he touched on conflicts throughout the world.

“Tensions remain high across the occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel, and the risk of a further sudden escalation in violence remains very real,” Zeid said.

“The occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel entered its 50th year last week,” Zeid said, alluding to the 1967 Six Day War.

He added that, “violence is among the many consequences of this prolonged oppression, including and inexcusably against civilians on both sides.”

He deplored violence by both Palestinian and Israelis.

Zeid said, however, that he was particularly concerned by instances of “excessive force” on the part of Israeli security forces in responding to Palestinian attacks in the West Bank and Israel that have so far claimed 38 lives.

“I have reminded the Israeli government of its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law on a number of occasions,” Zeid said.

The High Commissioner of Human Rights also took issue with Israel’s policy of administration detention in which it holds Palestinian security prisoners without trial.

“At the end of April, there were almost 700 Palestinian administrative detainees, more than double the figure at the end of September 2015, and the highest number since June 2008,” Zeid said.

“Over 400 Palestinian children are currently detained in Israeli prisons, among them 13 who are in administrative detention – again, the highest figure since public records began in 2008,” he added.

With respect to the Gaza, he warned that violence would break out between Palestinians and the IDF there, unless Israel lifts its restrictions on the flow of goods and people into the Strip.

“Recent skirmishes along the [Gaza] border [with Israel] are a warning signal that another escalation of hostilities is a very real prospect unless there is real improvement for the people of Gaza,” Zeid said. “The situation in Gaza is untenable, with the continuing illegal blockade impeding reconstruction and basic services, and bleeding the people of hope.”